POETRY QUARTERLY

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CASSELL'S
ANTHOLOGY OF
FRENCH POETRY

Selected and translated by
ALAN CONDER

"It is unique, not merely in the wealth and abundance of the poems brought together, but it is the quality of the renderings which have all the merits of exactitude and—what is so rare—all the merit of poetry."—PROFESSOR A. J. FARMER, *Chair of English Literature at the Sorbonne, Paris.*

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EDITORIAL

THE critics cry 'There is a crisis in poetry' as though they were afraid to discover they were dancing round a bonfire that has long gone out. But poetry continues to be published and as good poets continue to write it today as at any time in our literary history, although a good many comparatively young men are hastening to publish their Complete Poems as though the world was coming shortly to an end. Perhaps they realize that their period is truly over. In a recent broadcast Mr. Alan Ross, indeed, made it clear how differently the accent falls in the language of one generation and another. We are now in the fifties of our century which will, I believe, be a lean decade for poetry, because the great fissures in the crust of the human situation are beginning to show, and the shape of new movements in the stream of political developments may be inimical to the quiet voice of the poet. At first. The voice of our poets is perhaps a little too like the genteel whistling of false teeth on the radio. We have no great poets of protest like Patchen in America. The smell of death is still very much in the air and the rubble of the last war has not yet been cleared away.

With the big circulation weeklies and monthlies of Fleet Street falling like ninepins around us POETRY QUARTERLY intends to carry on the fight for culture against barbarism. But it is a fight, and the editing of this magazine will be ruthless and independent. It will continue to speak for the neglected poet from Zululand to San Francisco, by way of Paris, London and New York. This is not a time to be provincial.

THOMAS MERTON

Song

When rain, (sings light) has devoured my house
And wind wades through my trees,
The cedars fawn upon the storm with their huge paws.
Silence is louder than a cyclone
In the rude door, my shelter.
And there I eat my air alone
With pure and solitary songs

While others sit in conference.
Their windows grieve, and soon frown
And glass begins to wrinkle with a multitude of water
Till I no longer see their speech
And they no longer know my theatre.

Rivers clothe their houses
And hide their naked wisdom.
Their conversations
Go down into the deep like submarines:
Submerge them, with their pale expressions, in my storm.

But I drink rain, drink wind
Distinguish poems
Boiling up out of the cold forest:
Lift to the wind my eyes full of water,
My face and mind, to take their free refreshment.

Thus I live on my own land, on my own island
And speak to God, my God, under the doorway
When rain, (sings light) rain has devoured my house
And winds wade through my trees.

From THE TEARS OF THE BLIND LIONS
(*New Directions*)

JOHN DILLON HUSBAND

FOUR POEMS FROM *The Silver Circus*

The Broken Carousel

Above the broken carousel the moon, a public eye,
Round as a Roman chariot wheel, signals the summer night,
Trances the world in a wide net of dream;
Spellbinds, contributes legend to illusion.

The painted stallions freeze in postured leap.
The quartered lion dreams a distant sun.
Banshee, the purple spotted clown, in a white tent of nightshirt
Spreads in the comic postures of sleep,
Fumbles for the treasure of a snore,
Misses, and with slow perspication tries again.

The tight-rope walker called LaStrobe
Grudging insomnia poises a cigarette,
Balances the ring of darkness in his tent
Between two points of time.
Grown wise by measurements of space he knows
The plunge of broken stars,
The slipping moon.
He hears the broken carousel
Fall screaming into space.

Under a fold of gauze the fortune teller's globe
Is shaped with changing light. The table moves.
Three voices whisper from three quarters of the room,
Echo and answer, colouring the violet dark.
Lily with soiled hands sleeps in a mask of silence.

The wind riffles in canvas.
Where the riffle stands end, where only
The lovers and losers went, into the unlit grass,
The green wave shifts its tide, prepares to move,
Until even the elephant's reaching trunk
Seeks upward through the mounting green
And the moonlight filters through shapes of dream
Down to the haunted cave where the clown counts
purple lions
And Lily the clairvoyant pretends to sleep.

La Strobe

In time to come they will talk of it in all the towns,
They will say, 'Of them all, this was the best.'
LaStrobe the tight-rope walker went on wheels of fire
In the high light above the tent.
The spotlights silvered him
And gave him wings.
Even the elephants were silent,
And the lion, fastened silver in his chromium cage,
Watched with a moveless stare and waited too,
His own act done, for this to end.

And end it did.
But who would ever guess?
Who could have thought finale fine as this?
The evening's last show, this; LaStrobe,
LaStrobe the tight-rope walked on his wheels of fire
Walking between the stars and the single white
Upturned crowd-face anchored there below.

He crossed, and turned and crossed again,
Brightening the lights until he turned all gold;
Twice crossed, to show it could be done, and then,
Midcourse,
At even midway point,
Aerial equator found,
He, LaStrobe, the greatest of them all,
This man LaStrobe looked down at them,
Burning like God so near the stars;
Then he stepped out and fell.

Or did not fall, but floated,
Buoyed by the lights that brought him down.
And all around him on the way the air
Burned silverly and shone with sparks of gold.
But then, as though that were not all, or not enough,
To make the greatest act, to be the man LaStrobe,
Above all men the highest walker,

Falling he sang, and the thread of song
Shuttled like astral knitting needles
Drawing together in silver loops of sound
The frozen tiger burning with his eyes,
Lily the fortune teller turning a crystal ball
Like an old treasure between soiled palms,
The purple spotted clown,
Even the great blinked eye the crowd made.

The song had end, and where it ended
Light pooled and died.
The crowd whispered the night to silence;
Asleep along his father's arm the child
Spoke strange words printed in a dream,
Reached fingers out of sleep to touch the world,
And then was still.
The watchers went to narrow houses sealed by night.
The toothless tiger wishing toward the jungle stepped on
velvet to the bars
And sent one roar for old time's sake, and slept.

And all things slept.
The walking skeleton lay angled in a dream,
Madame Faraday, four hundred pounds on little feet,
The Rubber Boy, elastic at the ears,
And all of them, as dutiful memento to LaStrobe,
Said Now I Lay Me Down,
And slept.

Except the red-lipped lion, silver-spiked, secure,
Gold claws tight against the floor,
Large eye holding in a net
Two ends of space and time
Did not sleep, and would not sleep,
And had no need of sleep.

A Field of Trillium

The vendors in red caps cried tarts and hearts.
In the farthest stall,
The one this side the artificial waterfall,
A woman in a blue beret would sell—
Would give to whom she called 'the right'—
On penny postcards pieces of the world.
Hold them, so, the figures moved;
You heard the pitch of voices
And the whine of wheels.

My father in a chaise foretold with dignity
Long drought, two wars, a fall
More steep than waterfalls,
And circuses to come.

But my pursuit among the tents was singular,
And after Apex swallowed fire and Nostradamus
Drew a penguin from his hat:
When Savonarola left off shouting from his box
In seven tongues—
I found where trillium grew in the night,
A field of fallen stars,
And knew the place was right, and waited there
Until you came.

Your face bloomed toward me tender on its stalk,
You laid your petal hands in mine
As though all promises were kept,
Or one at least.

We walked among the flowers and past the tents
Until we saw LaStrobe the tight-rope walker
Balancing in heaven like a climbing star,
Who waved to us as though he saw us;
As if to say that being the highest walker of them all
he knew
The secret heart of secrets
And our own. We saw him fall.

We lay among the flowers like stars
And thought them into stars
In a long dream until the morning came,
My father came, burning, laughing, in his chaise.
'Tonight,' we said, and single-voiced, 'Tonight
And after that all nights there are
Until time has an end.'
We pulled a blossom, trillium or asphodel,
To sanctify the sign, and going
I saw the tents all closed in sleep.

Day went as a child's or lover's dream,
With children changing names.
A tall wall of building fell and smoked,
Letting us see as if a second eye-lid lifted
A boy posing a violin, a Helen dicing carrots in a sink,
Two gladiators roaring toe to toe,
And tables set for tea.

Evening was purple and royal, Apollo ruddy
As a prime king coming for his bed.
Then came the stars, and street lamps in the towns.
The roads were strange with dark, but I came to the tents,
I saw the canvas in dead pennants on old sticks,
Lily the fortune-teller's gaped mouth trapped in sleep,
The lion turned to shadow in his cage.

Beyond the tents, in the field where trillium grew,
I picked my fears like flowers, walking and waiting;
'All nights there are until time has an end,' I said;
And wondered that the words should roar so in my ears.
You did not come; or do I know you did not come?
For who knew what he knew, unless LaStrobe,
LaStrobe and the spiked lion in his cage?

Turning to go, childed by grief again,
I called my father's name, and only then I saw
The wall of trees like a green wave inward falling on me,
The grass grown taller than the tents,
And the flowers turning, burning, in my hands. . . .

The Silver Spike

The last time, I was old as locusts,
An old man rolling a stone.
Nobody called my name as if it were music.
Nobody called my name at all.
The tents were gone.
I stumbled on a stake-post mouldering,
And I found a coil of wire, rusted,
That broke like old egg-shell when I lifted it.

The figures were shaded with memory:
LaStrobe the high walker like a splinter of flame burning
on a wire,
The fortune teller with her hands like muddied claws,
The big tent flaring with eyes and animals
Whirling in burning hoops,
The air living and lifting with the unfinished voices of
girls,
And the boys' voices positive as lassoes between the tents.

In the centre, upright, druidical,
Polished by sun, rain-smooth,
I came to the silver spike
In a circle of grass smooth as turf.

There was the shadow of the lion there,
The spaces where the tents had been,
The signs paling as memory pales a dream,
Until it seemed a story we might have read
In a book lettered in gold, with a red cover,
That we forget together.

Only two things stayed:
The silver spike and the field of trillium;
And except for the spike the flowers
Might have been any field of flowers.
I remember Lily over the smoking globe:
'What do you think of that now, eh?
What do you make of that?'

from NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY REVIEW
Poet Signature III, Winter 1949

MAX JACOB

Nocturne

The humid whistling of the toads,
Rumour of boats at night, of oars . . .
Sound of a snake among the reeds,
Of a laugh stifled by hands,
Sound that a heavy body makes
Sinking into the water, sound
Of wary footsteps of the crowd,
A sound of sobs beneath the trees.
The distant sound of mountebanks.

(translated by *Alec Smith*)

PAUL ELUARD

On The Animal Scale

I

A Bull like a wheel
Away from the sand and the spring
And in whose scarlet eye
The disaster takes root

A Bull bringing to earth
As a bow as a sword
Cleaving the man in his midst
And in blood laying down

The foundations of the sun.

II

The fine weather is prey to the wind
The meadow is prey to sleek beasts

Between the horns of the Bull
Gushed forth the source of blood

The live source raged with foam
The hands clasped over a treasure

And the light without past
Forever ignorant of death.

III

Between the open arms of the Bull's
Horns feather and lead in agreement
The sun extended its mirror
To the dark torches of fear

But now a new wonder: a Bull sets out over
the meadow
To weave accord with the threads of crowds
And his flesh is a conflict
Gained in advance by the heart.

(translated by *Arthur Boyars*)

JOHN SINGER

Poor Ghost, I Know You Well . . .

Poor ghost, I know you well, come in, sit down,
Make conversation while the kettle boils.
The world pretends this logic and that creed,
These circumstances, those resorts of need,
But you and I have fought with sterner foils.

How is the busy world, poor haggard ghost?
That red arena where you stand and hope.
What hero is the darling of the wenches,
What silly martyr stoned for lack of inches,
And for the knowing ones, like us, what scope?

An evening and a life we'll talk as friends.
These prospects sound and those resources comb.
As proper, patient friends who know their place,
With kindly ear to hear the other's case.
Come in, Defeat, and make yourself at home.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Address Not Known

So you are gone, and are proved bad change, as we had always
known,
And I am left lonely in London the metropolitan city,
Perhaps to twist this incident into a durable poem—
The lesson of those who give their love to phenomenal beauty.

I am coming to think now that all I have loved were shadows
Strayed up from a dead world, through a gap in a raped tomb,
Or where the narcissus battens in mythological meadows:
Your face was painted upon the coffin-lid from Fayoum.

Is this my pain that is speaking? The pain was not long protracted:
I make a statement, forgive the betrayal, the meanness, the theft.
Human, I cannot suppose you had planned all that was enacted:
Fortitude must be procured to encounter the hollowness left.

The sun will not haver in its course for the lack of you,
Nor the flowers fail in colour, nor the bird stint in its song.
Only the heart that wanted somehow to have opened up
Finds the frost in the day's air, and the nights which appear too
long.

SYDNEY TREMAYNE

Ballachulish

Rain on the roses, sheep among the houses,
Gulls grown domestic, hens at seaweed's fringe;
Terns fuss and plunge,
Arrow-sharp optimists, tireless of wings and voices.
Through cottage garden, to commotion of sparrows,
A cat creeps with a wild dream in its eyes;
A grey crow flies
Across the low islet of the Celtic sorrows.
The great hills weather in a calm disorder,
Sun blows about them and a shining squall
Hurls light and hail.

Here speech is gentle, legend full of murder.
What seemed most solid suddenly is vapour,
And what seemed vaporous becomes a rock.
A precipice, a peak,
A track that turns, half-hidden, like a viper.

But now light streams along a gleaming roadway
Where dogs encounter with high waving tails:
Careful as cardinals
Ducks through the long grass make determined headway.
And all is gay and comical and comely
And even lush, but not as English shires
Whose broad backs wear
Prosperous livery, a little primly.
Here man is marginal. The hills are tameless.
Summer is drunk and magically mad.
Its whirling moods
Have no sobriety, its songs are shameless.
In such a violent country's tenderness
The deepest mystery lies—oh not content,
But wonderment
Of first thought's sound, the earliest wilderness.

But all this talk is poet's stuff and wildness
Born of the long dark and the sullen rain.
Too much shut in,
Kindling companionship against this coldness.
The smoke waves from the chimneys, blowing
downward.
The songs are of departure. Summer goes.
The old folk close
The door, crouch to the fire, turn inward.
Clouds bulge above the loch, touch the white houses.
A gull on a rooftop lifts its head and cries.
When summer dies
Rain hangs on grass and on the drooping roses.
Here, home, aged eighty, came one I remember
And made a garden. Ten years later sat,
Reproving the machinations of his cat,
Among his roses, in a mild September.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

London Trees

Sometimes these London trees
That huddle close to houses
Like children wanting comfort,
Must awake and wonder
Where is the green they shadowed,
The brooks, burdened with cresses?

And sometimes when, with the wind
And the grey sky of winter,
The bricks, the wall recede,
And the blue hills of cloud
Ascend from the city street
With promise of what the heart

Forever, forever desiring
Expects, and cannot hold,
Then, in the blunt-ended alleys,
The lanes we do not know,
Suddenly a leaf falls
Where no branches grow,

And, mirage or memory
In the sky's jade pastures hang
Islington's fields, the rushes
That Holborn swayed, the woods
That whisper still by night,
Lonelier than the streets.

Which run through their vanished glades,
Smell dank on the wind, send awe
To the heart which at midnight remembers
Immortal silence of trees
Waiting at corners, waiting
Until the fields return.

MARGARET WILLY

The Enemy

Following me through all the hollow years,
He whispered war. The alleys of unrest
Heard his feet tramp in echo of my own,
And every room housed the unwelcome guest.

Across each hour the lengthening shadow fell:
No kiss inviolate nor joy went free
From that implacable invader—who,
Shrouding his face, came on relentlessly.

War broke the uneasy truce. Home, little love—
All I held dear, he took: for his delight
Splintered and crushed it, leaving in his wake
A smouldering ruin on the indifferent night.

Possessed with hatred, panting with his loss,
The hounded then, swifter than sound, surprised
The hunter at his heel; and, triumphing,
Knew that pursuing demon exorcised.

Yet (how shall heart forget it?) as I struck,
What pain of spirit nailed him, crucified:
Eyes unaccusing even as the blood
Gushed in a wine-dark river from his side?

That was the hour when first I saw his face,
Blinding upon the night.
Now he is dead,
And wrong avenged . . . O but that enemy,
Who falling, filled my soul with mounting dread—
Was his name Death; or Love who huddled there,
His body lying white as broken bread?

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

Shapely Mountains Well Named

The children of my village,
The village of hunger
Called the Place of Refuge;
The children in the village of starving dogs
Sing in the snow-green winter dusk
Under the street lamps:
On the mountain lives a lady
Who she is we cannot tell

Hannah Martha Sian Elen
Yellow skinned old women
Gladwen Gwyneth Mair Nansi
Bold girls with foxglove cheeks
Siabod Lliwedd Tryfan Cynicht
Shapely peaks well named

The dogs starve
In this high mountain refuge.
Sitting at the house doors,
Locked out by their mothers gone
To pick up soldiers in the town;
The children have the voices
Of sweet birds, when they sing:
On the mountain lives a lady
Who she is we cannot tell.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

On Wheatham Hill

There was Noar Hill in the distance, gold as a beach,
Mysteriously cut on all sides by black, rumbling
But silent waves; and Oakshott Hanger, juniper
And beech slithering like a sea-washed scree down, down
To the corn-cut ridges, the unshaven, sun-cheeked
Fields; and comic, out of the trees, the little cap
Of Hawkley Church.

Across the miles of hills, the bright
Wedges where the corn had driven, the trees gathered
Close, sulky and dark, smudging almost as charcoal
Might. They were growing still and secretive, holding
Like scrolls their green dark before the turn of autumn.
This was reluctant, sombre presage of beauty.

And although you were not there, not to see and feel
This hill-held prophecy crouch across the landscape
In this silent month, I knew suddenly distance
Was dissolved, and then it was as if we walked where
This secret held, and waited on the turn of year
The trees sombre hulks to break their scarlet beauty.

TESSA M. SILLARS

I Speak for Narcissus

Be still,
My fair, reflective pool!
Mirror, in your ambiguous water-shimmer,
The broidered pattern of the commonplace;
Bend back the light that strikes too plainly
On the object,
Laying it flat, single, shadowless,
Without reflection.

Let the moving shadows play,
Tracing their intricate and fluid shapes
Where I have plunged and drowned
Myself
In my own depths.

Catch a new adroit reflection
That will challenge
Familiar passages seen
In single focus; lay
Your stress and emphasis gently in
Unexpected places.

* * * * .

Seen out of season, this
Discriminate selection quickens
The limp, habitual statement,
Sharpens the impact after the will
And brain have worked
To form a mobile shapeliness.
This is more true than truth,
This double vision,
Seeing
The thing—itself in its reflection.
(The slanted view, that is charged with comment.)

* * * *

You were wrong that held me satisfied
In the dull, unchanging chisselling
Of my art upon myself:
This was my choice, not
The idol in the mirror, but
The frame,
Which is
Selection.

SUZANNE LETHBRIDGE

Vertigo

There came a darkness then, which
Falling about a great domed emptiness
Came upon a silent waking brain and tore
Its crumpled flesh with blackened hands.

A pretty posy from a deadened tree
Is whisperingly left
Without the house whose door is ever closed
Whose glass-eyed shutters bleakly turn aside
To cackle with the quick and breaking stars
Or weep unheard.

JAMES KIRKUP

Elegy for a Dead God

Leave us alone. Leave us, hope
of our deliverance, leave us alone.
We did not deserve
the wonder in our midst,
for by inexcusable error
that we knew, and did not
know we were committing,
we ignored his nature and his need.

Give us a dead flower, O someone,
a dead leaf, a glass wreath,
give us the telescoping spine
of dim and dimmer-focussed dying,
the crack of the dead branch
torn by the gale of earth
from the air's crashing tree,
the shot hare's human crying.

What is our fault, what word
did we utter as if it were untrue?
Give us a dead bird
in the broken nest of our clasping fingers
And let it lie there
under the dead thought of our speaking,
under the dry lips of our inconsolable
weeping, under the dead fright of our eyes.

Wandering all night in the forgotten rain,
we did not know, we knew too well that impermanent
divinity, but all we could think of was the tall
presence inhabiting our loneliness.
Now voices in the afternoon calling from across the street
are always yours, and yours the steps running towards us
at evening, to greet our solitude with words and wishes,
measuring the depths of heaven with a light remark.

Why did you ever speak to us,
O, why did you let us drink
the wines we did not know,
and now will never know?
Why did you teach us smiles
that were not our own, and strange
laughter that we loved, and a loquacity
rich and curious to our startled throats?

For we are an ignorant people: not
omniscient, because we know too much.
What was it killed you?
What careless look, meaningless clutch
of dying hands towards the never-dying,
what unspoken tenderness too much
in our unbroken silences? And yet,
what god were you, who did not understand our sentences?

Love begets love, so they said.
It was not love that begot ours,
and the love we had for you
destroyed you with its cruelty.
What is the meaning of this song without you?
What is love, now that it fails its own believers?
Only forgive our blindness, and your pain,
forgive your knowledge of our pain.

Dead to us, you cannot die.
And when we, lost ones,
wander in your city's emptiness,
you are everywhere and nowhere, as a god should be.
But we grow sick with memories, cannot forget the
shadow at our sides
that is the only remnant of the air you took away.
Be comforted, remembering the forsaken faces of the dead
who once knew love that touched to life
the stilled darkness at the centre of the smallest stone.
For though you were a god, we know that you, too, are
much alone.

NICHOLAS MOORE

A Long Time Ago

("O vice is nice
And virtue won't hurt you"
—*Sir Percy's Song:* Gavin Ewart)

A long time ago, depending on their mothers,
Many have learnt to endure a love that smothers,
And, hit by it, have finally hit back,
Trying to find revenge for what they lack
Later as cruel or too insistent lovers.

Yet, making such demands, each one discovers
A loss that separates him from his brothers:
O many there are who started on the wrong tack
A long time ago.

Yet, seeing clearly through these early bothers
Myself, I find my mind still bilks and pothers,
Faced by an age or more of racial wrack.
These flotsam errors hunt like a hungry pack,
And my virtue scalds me much as sin scalded others
A long time ago.

ALEX COMFORT

The Sleeping Princess: A Journey with Figures

Persons:

The Poet
The Landscape
A Bridal Party
Two Cardplayers
A Man with a Child
A Man with an Axe
} passengers in the train

Time: 1949

Post by post the train eats up places
joining now to its start and the unreached end.
Flowers and fields, gates, tenements,
the ruffled shops, the graveyard, the pool
for children's boats, the park with serpentine paths,
gardens sitting like swallows along a wire:
the cooling-towers grouped by the creased river
under a flat light brightening as day grows.
Quitting these, then, we are carried between
diffident cattle into the cup of country.
Sheep run from our shadow, insolent birds stare.

It it an empty house, or one
the master dead, where the drawn curtains
part for the curious, showing the numbered labels
on desk and wedding-group and trophy, or
the coasts of our childhood, copied at full scale
for backcloth, or a familiar room
seen through a foreign window? What odd season
has struck the cyclists in the watermeadows
seeming to loiter and wait, the white
houses, the fields and roundsmen suddenly become
provisional—yards, gates, tenements wearing
a look of vacant expectation?

A poplar felled, a mirror taken down
leaves a cold space, alters an outlook, or
when in the hollow after the sirens, streets
and rooms turned roofless, and the sky touched

our hair, sounds became louder—
this known country unknown. A signal sound
ticks like a footstep over roofs and roads
the autumnal noise of time's enormous map
rolled slowly up to leave a naked wall.
The land turns sea—we and our handfuls of smoke
drive like the unknown troubled sleepers
travelling birds the wind
has blown from the South course
to fall at sea or strike the lantern glass
when in a mute shower the scattering feathers follow.

*

The city fathers lie
between the packed estates
ranged like their houses: over
their territory the mourning trains keep watch.
Their headstones standing in order
or grouped by families
do not acknowledge their neighbours
separate privacies
gathered in private death
cry with a desolate voice
each white-clad, laundered father
in a choir together, 'We
did not set this thing in motion.
We did not leave our fire
willingly, children, to be watchers
over your long division.

Our books and business, your
mothers and grandchildren,
the houses with painted doors
that surround our formal gathering—
is it we are changed or they?
O tell us what has gone wrong—
from frozen sentry-go
before the curtains are drawn
watching through alien glass
we see the seeds of our doubts
that troubled us in the slack
of sleep and waking, grown to a roaring grove

church high and imminent
like the tall chimney racing across clouds
that as children we dared not watch
fearing its instant fall.'

Sleep, you importunate
parents and sweethearts, sleep
vast concourse of citizens, idle
army. You will not hear
when the trains cease to pass.
Time has left you behind
as the trains leave you, run
beyond your city limits
leaving their wreaths of smoke.
Death presents no choice.
Neutrals, your separate states
their war long lost look on—
the living hesitates.

Harmless as those on whom
the tower in Siloam fell
we wrestle with the wild
hysterics of practical men,
the clowns turned ringmasters,
the scurvy tightrope dancers
the crooks who compass to tame
the Eagle, the Great Bear,
dunces who know the answers.
When the chimney indeed
slowly at first, then faster like a knee
bends, and the air grows dusty
its final footfall will
not make your conclave start
more than another foot
more than a closing door,
the nursery candle being carried away.

And patient as when the walls
of the Saint's prison fell
and doors unlocked themselves
obstinate in their beds
the living sleepers wait
whom time and faction tumble

in that dumb privacy—
wake to assume at length
the deaths that they resemble.

▪

Placid country, county of marriages,
real under our strange journey, making
the churches under chestnuts scatter their guests

country of couples, making the platform
run with leavetaking faces, wishes
that the window turns to lips, and these fall back.

May Margaret sits in her bower door
    Sewing her silken seam:
She heard a voice in Elmond's wood
    And wished she there had been.

Mild she has closed the door
and let the window down,
and as the blown smoke passing replaces

the running cousins and cut flowers
you make your way together out of the siege—
anxious in the darkness full of sentries

the wall's shadow bigger than life, the closed
gate once traversed almost recalling
to the security of an enclosed place.

Reaching the woods, remember to go south,
walking in streambeds, moving chiefly at night—
puzzle the stupid bloodhounds by your doublings,

build no shelter this side of the hills:
even there, see your roof does not catch the sun.
The line unrolls its woods and bridges. White

cherubs of steam with hidden faces, hunting
dogs in fields, running with brisk
determination, but still falling behind.

I have no songs or presents, Lady—
only a refugee's advice: Be wary,
be quick, be quiet, keep off the main roads.

Do not let contentment deafen you, nor time dull.
When once you hear, on the clear afternoon
or coming gusty at night the distant barking

gather your children, leave the pot on the fire
the coat on the door, the door itself swinging;
From the next hill look back and see the glow

spreading, the smoke's tall beanstalk overtopping trees.

*

The battlefields lie like water, level
as a calm sea, quiet as a pool.
We cross them in full sail. Look at the green
battlefields, the firm self-healing skin
of level country good for cavalry,
the cover of small woods and reeds in thickets
whose left flank rests upon a waveless river.
The men whose voices are this country's wind,
who left their marriages in that small wood,
saw the attack grow larger in that mist—
the tenants of this battlefield found their places
many years back, I do not know in what quarrel.

Some hid there, and were found, remaining
like men dropped from a hand. The green map carries
two small swords crossed, marking their staked-out claim.
The village street pretends to know nothing, empty
and nameless, bicycles and children
running like chicks under the church's feathers.
This village had a name, known only to those
born there, who speaking it always had seen
the hill, those houses, the two sloping trees
until the hedgers coming back in line
found the street choked with sweating strangers,
black, orderless, sitting aimless on steps and walls,
and half a hundred dead laid out in orchards
like trees for planting, spots of blood on doorsteps.

These bivouaced and went, or vanished, leaving
the name of the place, in one day, for all time,
broken—and turned into a kind of curse,
suddenly unfamiliar, having an echo
loud like the word Alas spoken in a cave.
Albuhera, Gallipoli, Alamein,
Waterloo, Badajoz, Plataea, places where children
were born. Hearing it, they smell the same slaughterhouse
smell
build up the fences, harrow the hoofmarks out.
Who would have thought it? Here? Ourselves?

The winners crossed the hill. The losers are here.
All through the counties under hedges and streets
the battlefields lie parcelled like small farms,
tenants or unclaimed. Looked at the level country,
look at the turning map, here and here, the timeless
watch of these fields and fences over
things repeated like the pattern of seasons:—

under some latitude, grassy, with ash and birches,
or full of flowering unfamiliar trees
or on a grassless beach, or in a dead town,
there is a wood like this for every one of you.

Under full sail the century's journeys
traversing England or Europe coast beside
its woundless level, and you move
to find your tenancy.
Travellers behind
personal, impenetrable windows
single in your seats behind your loneliness, look
here and here, your places. Growing strange
the counties join their unknown villages.
Mile by mile moving, though distant, remember
the frightened grocers of some other village
their boots treading in someone's planted crop
running and falling in another mist,
not you but like you. With this speed you go
by level track and deafening cuttings headlong
to find your place. Europe your headstone, crowded
with little
illegible names.

The clowns turned ringmasters
not you but like you, patiently divide
into your battlefields the land's new map.
Under clear skies, flowers grow in the waiting fields.

*

Those who travel with me
from insignificant stations
that stick in the country's throat—
cases on luggage racks,
this bucket dipped in the nation
two who play cards: one with a child: one with an axe—

carry their trades and chances
by cord or under arm
white eyes that watch a speaker
silent with one another,
privately, willing to learn
nothing, receive no news, admit no brother.

Do I carry my trade, or they
smell and distrust my verse?
If the hard crust broke, would they ask
'What have you to say?
Things are come to a pass—
the train runs on, whether we play or refuse to play.

What do you want? We sit
and wait for it. So do you.'
I look across at the hands—
four that shuffle the pack,
two are the child's, and two
holding the child, and two for the axe propped on
the rack:

and think: look down at your own—
feel the tongue in your mouth.
My trade is shrunked down
to a negative, giving the lie
to the lie that means your death.
You in your private silence have left me the cry:

Mother is making your bed
in the Agamemnonian dark.
Your four hands shuffle your fate.
The evil axe is your own.
The papers that screen you bark
for your death, and you leave me to bellow alone

the schedule of First Aid
the procedure in case of fire.
'What can we do? Where go?
The time is out of joint—
there is nothing possible here—
our hands are single, our voice and your voice faint—

we may be healed in the end—
perhaps they are telling the truth—
we must Stand Up for our Rights—
we never have had a chance—
there is no tongue in our mouth—
the fine is forty shillings for the first offence!'

This is the work I do—
I gather your scattered No
your inarticulate salvage
of bloody-mindedness
drive your doubts in a row
as a fence between you and the eyeless, voiceless, press

of those who were Citizens
who waited another week,
whose poor disguises failed,
who did not speak soon enough,
who thought it useless to speak,
whose No was killed by custom, and they by custom
killed.

Give me this for my work.
I ask you to speak, not hear.
I am your audience. Give
the disobedient word
that will open history's ear
like the prince's kiss that woke, and the sleepers stirred.

HERBERT READ: THE POET AS STOIC

THERE are poets who evoke in a number of critics reactions or sensations which, while not images, seem to stand as summarizing hall-marks of the poems in question. Thus, Alice Meynell has remarked how the verse of Coventry Patmore produced a feeling of 'sidereal distance' in her; how the work of George Darley suggested to her mind the twin impressions of blue and gold; whilst Herbert Read, in a similar fashion, has commented on the idea of light which the poems of Rilke awaken in him. Just how far we must attribute these responses to the nature of the critic or the poet is something that cannot be considered in this essay. For what it is worth, I can only mention how the verse of Herbert Read presents itself to me in the over-all picture of a winter's day. Reading it, I think of snow and ice and dryness, with perhaps the slightest tincture of a reddening sun.

It would, I believe, be possible to relate this arbitrary and personal impression to specific poems the poet has written (to *Winter Grief, Inbetweentimes,* and *To a Conscript of 1940,* for example, in which some description of the cold season features); or, again, in a rather less literal manner, to account for the impression produced by tracing it to the effects created by certain technical devices: to the poet's severe and restrained use of language, his suspicion of excessive or exuberant diction, the stringent topiary of his stanzas, a refusal to cede his meaning to his music; in short, to all those formal properties which led Sir Henry Newbolt, when speaking of these poems, to remark upon their 'surgery hardly to be endured'.

Such a course of examination, I shall not, however, pursue in this study. Instead, by recalling my original impressions in the environment in which they occurred, I shall hope to arrive at more objective conclusions by making, so to speak, a sort of Inner Circle journey.

It was in the khaki winter of 1940 that I read the verse of Read with both care and excitement. Hitherto, I had perused his verse, which enforced a sort of intellectual recognition from me but did not succeed in provoking that *frisson,* that curious intimate stirring of the mind which the personal intuition of poetry occasions. At that time I was serving in the Forces, and for the following five years his volume entitled *Thirty-five Poems* was never separated from my private kit. One of the reasons for my

attraction was obviously to be discovered in the poet's attitude towards war.

Here, it is necessary for me to state briefly my own position, which was that of a conscientious objector serving in an Army non-combatant corps. As a critic of human behaviour, I was therefore partisan; but in my rôle of aspirant poet I sought for a more objective viewpoint, for what one may term the aesthetic perspective, which propaganda writing of any kind precludes. In those poems of Read where the subject-matter is war, I found the sort of impartial yet impassioned attitude which I was seeking. Just as Percy Wyndham Lewis, in his novel *The Apes of God*, had patented a type of all-round satire, a medium of artistic ridicule which made no jealous differentiation between one character and another, but saw them all as equally ludicrous, as equally fit for tarring-and-feathering; so Read, it appeared, had arrived at the point of seeing people in their own right, from their own standpoint, in the light of their own values. As human beings, we tend to censure all our fellows who appear different to us. Only the inanimate or animal world is free of this suspicious disapproval. We do not, for example, criticize the pear for being itself instead of a pumpkin, or look askance upon the camel because it does not resemble the giraffe. This instinctive tolerance of approach which the still-life artist needs must practise was something that I found realized in Read. What I saw was essential here was not an attitude to one's subject of moral approval or disapproval: the important thing was identification—a temporary though whole-hearted acceptance. Thus, in a poem entitled *The Execution of Cornelius Vane*, an artistic case is made out for the physical coward in battle, just as in *The End of a War* the dying German officer's speech offers an apologia for an aggressively martial ethic. This, however, is not to say that Read refused to commit himself as far as his own personal feelings were concerned. 'But you, my brother and my ghost,' he wrote, in *To a Conscript of 1940*,

> *if you can go*
> *Knowing that there is no reward, no certain use*
> *In all your sacrifice, then honour is reprieved.*
>
> *To fight without hope is to fight with grace,*
> *The self reconstructed, the false heart repaired.*

Such a maturity of disillusionment—a species of deep yet constructive doubt—was a property I did not recognize in any of the

other '1914' poets. Two qualities especially, then, drew me to Read: his suspension of a private moral judgment in subjects treated objectively, and a stoic adulthood of attitude when the poem was written in the first person. It was not, therefore, to be wondered at that I, in my double role of participant and spectator (the man committed to some course of action, the artist desiring freedom of vision) should obtain from this poetry a sustaining rather than disturbing excitement. Hitherto, I had got from verse a pleasure less salutary than morbid. Swinburne and Dowson and Fitzgerald had hardly braced the nerves of my mind; and Eliot, read in this decadent context, had principally appeared as an elegiac poet:

Eyes that last I saw in tears
Through division

In the same way I cannot admit to having derived imaginative strength from the Leftist poets of the 'thirties. The preview of a social revolution which Auden and Spender presented in their work helped to increase my hectic frame of mind rather than to discipline my intellect for struggle. I felt the landslide of history coming, and doubted just how much would survive a war. This attitude of waiting-for-the-end was substantiated by MacNeice's poems. I was, therefore, entirely wanting in any tonic element which verse might provide.

In coming across the works of Read, then, at that moment, I discovered a spartan pick-me-up. Unlike the excitement set up by the poets of the 'nineties there was nothing depressive or feverish about it. Its nature was precise and intellectual; its effects could be satisfactorily located; and if in such piece as *Sic et Non, Inbetweentimes,* and *Time Regained* the elegiac strain is heard, it cannot be said of Read's work as a whole (as indeed it may be said of many modern poets') that there was a style primarily invented for the conveyance of nostalgic impressions. Compare, for example, the poems of Read dealing with the theme of childhood with those by R. L. Stevenson or Edith Sitwell. The latter are whimsical or sentimental; and even Eliot, in this instance, writes like one who is pitifully haunted:

Children's voices in the orchard
Between the blossom–and the fruit–time

Twenty years and the spring is over;
Today grieves, tomorrow grieves,
Cover me over, light-in-leaves;

Read, on the other hand, proffers the clear picture, unsmudged by any tears of remembrance:

We scurry over the pastures
chasing the windstrewn oak-leaves.

We kiss
the fresh petals of cowslips and primroses.

We discover frog-spawn in the wet ditch.

His is a childhood of 'the innocent eye'.

Read, then, we see is not so much a poet of spontaneous or immediate emotion as emotion apprehended reflectively. His poems formulate in intellectual terms the fluctuating dialectics of the heart. Some of them read like abstracts of emotion, like précis of human relationships:

Abelard was: God is
my love, I his
learned lass. But God is
not near

cries Heloise, in the poem *Sic et Non*, laconically tracing the course of her distress; whilst the poet, speaking for himself, generalises a personal grief in the poem *Time Regained*:

The limbs remember fire and joy
and flesh to flesh is benison
of entity;

but the mind has reasons of its own
for circumventing life and love's
sodality.

A private sorrow has been lifted to the status of a psychological law. And on those rare occasions when he shows himself as a poet of elemental heart-break, the whole thing is clean and honest, with no compensating after-thought by which we sometimes speciously seek to mitigate our suffering. 'Yes, yes,' he writes in *Epitaph*,

Yes, yes
and ever it will come to this:
Life folds like a fan with a click!
The hand that lately beat the air
with an arch of painted silk
falls listless in the lap.

This unhysterical recital of fact is followed by no eschatological indulgence such as we find in Wordsworth's *Lucy* or in Rilke's *Death of the Beloved.* Instead, the business of living and dying is described in the language of a kind of vivid physics:

> *The air*
> *the agitation and the flush*
> *close and collapse. A rigid frame*
> *restricts the limbs that once ran free*
> *across the hearth across the fields*
> *over the threatening fields.*

Exactness of reference does not exclude feeling; nor does the narration of events in terms of natural science prevent the poem from being valid as an expression of purely human history. Read, in this piece, we can say, reveals himself as the poet of a clearly realistic metaphysic. His survey is general: not transcendental.

These qualities, examined above, were just some of the aspects of Read in which I discovered an opposition to the deliquescence of too much contemporary verse, with regard to both diction and sentiment. They were, however, but the negative proofs of the poet's resistance to the inroads of despair, to amorphous feeling and undisciplined language; to all the seductions of our crumbling time. Whilst Eliot professed himself engaged in holding a position already won, Read rather urged the necessity of advancing to works of reconstruction. He was thus a poet of stability in something more than a defensive sense. 'There has been despair,' says Starr, in a poem entitled *The Nuncio*:

> *there has been despair: the first shock of defeat*
> *cost us more lives in faith than in men.*
> *Now we must build again*
> *repair our broken parapets*
> *dig fresh communication trenches.*
> *The lines are cut: runners must proceed with*
> *messages.*
> *At all costs we must make contact*
> *assemble our scattered units*
> *issue orders for a counter-attack.*

At a first glance, and out of its own context, this passage might appear to bear powerful resemblance to the pylon-and-cement-mixer verse of the 'thirties. The likeness, however, is one of superfices: the intent of the poem is something quite different. Perhaps the distinction might be explained by saying that while

the poets of the 'thirties (Auden, Spender, and the 'Left Review' figures) employed imagination towards a social end, Read's concern was imagination itself whose inner workings he attempted to describe by using society as a metaphor. In saying this, I do not wish to imply that *The Nuncio* is poetry of the highest order. To apply the language of the poem itself, its author's eyes are 'fixed on some abstract conception of the universe and man' in too unswervingly purpose a manner to allow free-play to the poetic powers. It remains none the less, an important manifesto of all those issues that Read bears in mind: the nature and function of imagination, its relation to consciousness, society and will —against whose background his poems are written. Looked at in another light, we see it as a too-conscious earnest of much that his poems subconsciously attempt. Poetry, Read has defined by implication, in certain lines of his own verse, as the synthesis of reason, sense, and feeling; or, again, as a synthesis of reason and love. *The Nuncio* lacks this affective basis, but provides us with the creative prescription:

Reason like a lily
fed by sense and feeling
blooming eternally
ruling
all the flowers of the field

This 'dry Sophoclean light' evenly distributed over his poems permits no washes of extravagant colour and nourishes no exotic images. Through a northern visibility, the objects in his poems stand out without being magnified or diminished, fixed by an even and steady regard. This verisimilitude is partly effected by the use of a large percentage of scientific and technical words;* and one may note here with what greater precision Read deposits them in his lines than such a meritricious poet as Auden, who—lacking the philosophic interest which the former feels for scientific studies—resorts to them in an effort to give a stop-press 'modernity' finish to his verse.

Another characteristic of this style is what we may term its neutrality of colour: an absence of all those attributes of writing which draw attention to themselves, often to the cost of the composition, considered not in isolated parts but as a whole. This dis-

*See Henry Treece's introduction to *Herbert Read* (Faber & Faber) 1942

tinctive negative dress is not to be confused with an insipid use of language.

A saint am I and a saint are you
It's perfectly, perfectly, perfectly true

wrote Auden in one of his jazz-doggerel pieces, providing us with as perfect an example of jingling insipidity as one could hope to witness.

Who pursued understanding with patience like a sex
had unlearnt
Our hatred, and towards the really better
World had turned their face?

he writes, again, with a weak didactic glibness and slackness of speech. Against such exemplary verbal flatness, we feel how the following passage by Read is poetry of a very different order, not timeless and nerveless, as the above, but concentrated—for all its lack of colour:

I do not forget the oath
taken one frosty dawn
when the shadows stretched
from horizon to horizon:

Not to repeat the falso act
Not to inflict pain
To suffer, to hope, to build
To analyse the indulgent heart.

Wounds dried like sealing-wax
upon that bond
But time has broken
The proud mind.

At the beginning of this essay, I spoke of how Read's verse called up the thought of a winter's day in my mind, and hope by now to have briefly hinted at some of the factors involved in this suggestion. To say that Read was the poet of an inner historical winter—of the hard geometric winter of our times—would not, I hazard, be to venture a statement of too private a nature. In this dry cold season of doubt, I think of his poetry working like a saw, its blade revolving with a keen electric hum: functional, stoical, astringent, and undaunted.

DEREK STANFORD

THE NEW ROMANTICS

THE task of the classical is to retrieve, of the romantic to release. In this respect, in the last two decades, the classical movement in poetry has done its work. Certain values in danger of obliteration have been preserved. Principally through Eliot and Pound, poetic technique has been given new subtleties, and religion and metaphysics have re-enacted their historic rôles. Eliot has shown how a compressed emotion can flower and how the pressure of the past can release the energies of the present. But the Pound-Eliot movement is now losing its force. A new romanticism is at hand, and we shall see gradually how the classical soil has nurtured this new and necessary growth.

The first world war broke a decadent romanticism when its implications exposed the poverty of the Georgians, and the second world war has generated reactions against the classicism of the 'twenties and 'thirties. But Eliot's influence has extended almost to the end of the 'forties, and it may never be completely obscured, even in the heyday of a new romanticism. This is so because Eliot is not a pure classicist. His early poetry shows a peculiar mixture of the classical and the romantic, which is a brilliant example of the truism that a twilight enhances the real qualities of both night and day. Such a poem as the early *Portrait of a Lady* is equally as romantic in idea as classical in structure. Once we have digested the notion that the Lady has had more than a nodding acquaintance with Henry James, the romantic element seems to enlarge itself immediately at the expense of the classical. The poem, in fact, evokes a curious nostalgia, not unlike that engendered by the music of Chopin; a nostalgia compounded of the racial rather than the individual memory.

The social background against which the young romantics are developing is no less formidable than that of the 'thirties. It is much worse than that of the late 'twenties, for then there existed a kind of embittered idealism which gave point to both the optimism and the cynicism of the time. The romantic, unlike the classicist, has no well-founded temple of tradition in which to gain a temporary sanctuary from the hauntings of the insatiable ego. If he creates his own ivory tower, it is at best an isolated and insecure refuge. In the temple there is at least a feeling of the security of numbers, however transient. The romantic is not a member of a school, he is simply one of a number seeking a

reality which has as many contradictory facets as there are seekers. Because of his comparative isolation, he feels the sense of his particular vulnerability. It is a personal feeling, peculiar to himself and his problems, and if it includes others, it is by accident and is not a design such as that imposed by the classical conception upon classicists. In the works of the great romantics there is ample evidence of this feeling. It is implied in Wordsworth's 'prison house', in Coleridge's deepening dejection and consciousness of a wasting talent, and in Keats's 'bright star', plotting his loneliness and frustration in the heavens. This sense of insecurity and uncertainty probably lies at the back of every creative mind, but the classicist is better equipped to meet it. His acceptance of dogmas and traditions limit his consciousness of the void by fixing attention upon human landmarks. Like the rock-climber who ascends from crag to crag, keeping his gaze from the summit until it is within reach, the classicist may avoid the sensation of being 'lost' in the dim complex of his own subconscious.

These difficulties, with which the rising romantic movement is faced, are not essentially different from those confronting the Eliot and Auden groups. But they are less clear. Less clear because the impact of our industrial civilization upon the individual is becoming grotesque. Every individual in some degree seeks at least a semblance of unity with his age. It may be that unity of opposites—the unity of hatred and revolt—but he needs to feel that in one way or another he does or might belong. The young romantic, faced with this dilemma, cannot easily define his attitude. He can, like Eliot, compromise unsuccessfully (the theory of *The Idea of a Christian Society* is a worthy failure), like Auden he can protest and depart, he can without glory build his own little insubstantial tower; or he can simply live on, reflect upon his experiences, and see what for good or ill happens to him. It is this last course that the majority of the young poets of today appear to be following.

Each of these attitudes offers something, but none is likely to reduce the gulf between the poet and society. All have in common the assumption that art must have a life of its own—a life but sketchily related to that of contemporary society. In the eighteenth century the social life of the cultured was sufficiently powerful to elevate or destroy a poet. His talent might earn him his dinner, it might bring him a good fame, or reduce him to almost insupportable poverty. The issues were clear, and if a poet

elected to become a man of manners and give the cultured what they admired, he could earn a living. No poet by his art can do that today. True, the eighteenth-century poet was often limited by the exacting tastes of the time, and good taste equally with bad may limit art. But an age in which Horace is read for the same reasons as the Sunday Press is read today, is certainly an age in which any poet can live in hope. If he fails, his failure is likely to be that of a too great genius or a too feeble talent. He is not doomed to comparative failure from the cradle onwards. If he is ultimately rejected, at least he is heard.

The nineteenth-century romantics were born into an age of expansion and hope. The French Revolution inspired before it disgusted, and that inspiration was sufficient to foster a number of reactions expanding literature and infusing it with new life. After this initial disillusion, Wordsworth went on to embrace a Christian pantheism which illumined his long and fruitful life. The twentieth century has had its revolutions and its hopeful revolutionaries. Eliot is perhaps the only poet to show an evolution comparable with that of Wordsworth. But where are the counterparts of Keats, Shelley or Coleridge? The poets of the Spanish civil war, the Marxists, the 'parlour Bolsheviks' of the 'thirties, what marks have they left upon literature? Perhaps it is too soon to say. Auden, it is true, might qualify for a modern Shelley. He it was who caused the first damaging cracks in the classical façade, but his later work seems full of the confusion of frustrated genius.

Somewhat cloudily, Auden saw the choice as between an unavoidable communism and a social order which must seek to solve its fundamental contradictions through participation in an unavailing war. Certain affinities between Eliot and Auden existed. Both were opposed, though from differing impulses, to the so-called democratic principles of western society. For Eliot the choice lay between a sporadic humanism and a precise orthodoxy, capable of providing that inner control necessary to the creation of a civilization defined as a 'spiritual and intellectual co-ordination on a high level'. Auden never appeared to reach the point of definition. His communism seemed to owe less to Marx than to Bakunin. It was a kind of anarchism; the hope of a creative destruction without which no new synthesis could take place. He sought to inspire and propagate, to destroy and heal at once. Auden wrote as a romantic, urged on by the fever of his sense of approaching doom. He began with a negation, today he

is struggling towards affirmation through a personal integration the nature of which is not yet clear. He is the greatest of the romantics of the 'thirties, and his personal conflict appears to be far from resolved. Of the other poets associated with him, little can be said, except that the majority have come to terms with themselves a little too easily.

But Auden does not figure as a leader of the new romantic impulse, and it is not to Auden's influence that we must look for guidance towards understanding its roots. We can immediately dispense with any notion of mere 'escapism', for almost any attitude can become 'escapist'. The word is, in fact, so wide in its implications that it no longer has much value. All our attitudes are in a sense held to enable us to escape from something, if only the weary contemplation of our private selves. In turning to Communism, Auden was escaping from a class-consciousness far more devastating than that felt by the ordinary Marxist, hiding his ostrich head in the sands of the dialectic. We must avoid, too, the errors common to those with the pigeon-hole type of mind. The temptation to gather opinion into neat bundles, and find a tidy little corner for each, is very great, particularly among critics of literature. But labels are the curse of literature, and if we are to make assumptions about poets, we must begin by remembering that they are first of all human beings. The assumption that all romantic poets will differ from all classical poets in the same degree is nonsense. And yet this assumption is behind quite a lot of critical thinking. The terms romantic and classical are tendentious, not absolute. The difference between two romantic poets can be as marked as that between a romantic and a classicist.

D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy are both romantic poets, but between them exist differences as obvious as between Milton, and Wordsworth. Beside Lawrence, Hardy might appear classical, were it not for the fact that his addiction to the use of irony, in and out of season, shows that he, in common with Lawrence, was moved by the 'inner Light' which Eliot has pronounced against as a large luminary among the heresies. Hardy's quiet, unassuming persistence in giving his characters an inevitable 'raw deal' was indeed considered by his earlier critics to have about it something of the characteristics of Greek tragedy. But the situations in his novels creak with the imposition of an unwarranted philosophy, they groan with the pangs of an unwavering determinism. Hardy's philosophy of life might perhaps be summed

up in the contemporary vulgarism: 'You've had it'. Lawrence's immediacy is by comparison as water is to granite, yet both were romantics and both after the same end: the discovery of meaning in life without the aid of the known and traditional guides. Romantic or classicist, the fact is that every poet uses words in order to escape from words. At the back of each mind is the conception of a poem which shall move towards a perfect abtraction, an abstraction which is timeless and yet cognisant of time. The endeavour is to arrive at the heart of the poem, the reality which dissolves all words into pure sensation. Coleridge understood the problem when he wrote: 'Words are but shadows of notions, even as our notional understanding is but a shadowy abstraction of the real and living truth'. In that observation lies the gateway to a multiplicity of worlds. It is the essence of the romantic.

After a period of classical poetry, of the observance of the rules laid down for a school of poets, we think of a romantic reaction with a sense of relaxation. To the inexperienced and the poets of small talent and large enthusiasms, such a period is dangerous. It is perhaps true to say that every poet is born a romantic, although there are in certain individuals strong tendencies towards the classical, towards orders and precision of thought. The analogy of tuberculosis may serve to illustrate the point, in that no man is born with the disease, but in some there exists pronounced tendencies which, in certain circumstances, flower into the disease proper. The romantic poet is born with distinct tendencies towards the malady of fluency which, if not restricted by his environment, may lead to the diffuse, the sententious and the accidental. Classical leadership limits these tendencies and may, as a result, produce, for a time, poetry which is strong and vital, in a period when the art in general shows signs of ennervation. But the most necessary movement must in time give place to its opposite, since all things contain within themselves the elements which promote their own decay. On every new movement there must fall the shadows of past declines. In poetry which seeks to liberate from the limitations of dogma and a too nicely defined tradition, there is always the danger that words intended to reveal may only obscure. They may foster unreality by expressing emotions which are not so much *felt* as *apprehended*—'Recalling things that other people have desired'. Into this desuetude fell much of the work of the Georgians. They had forgotten the principle, reasserted by Eliot, that a significant

work of art must show somewhere the ravages of a private conflict within the artist himself. In their work conflict was largely absent, for they were court poets without a court to explain or embellish. In the shabby boudoirs they came to inhabit, words were not even the 'shadows of notions'; they were unguents for embalming—and what is embalmed must first be dead.

But it is naïve and uncritical to regard any cyclic movement at its weakest point as a persistent depressant. If in decay the romantic becomes florid, the classical in like circumstances becomes peevish. But in all decay there are to be found signs of past greatness. The ruin exemplifies change, and that which changes gives cause for hope, even in an age which seems to fluctuate between fear and indifference. There is indeed a warning in the Georgian decline for any subsequent romantic movement, but there is also a promise. If the romanticism of Coleridge and Keats could falter through Tennyson to the Georgian twilight, it could also renew itself in the classical-romanticism of the Eliot poets. And it is from the Eliot group that the neo-romantics are chiefly deriving. These new romantics are likely to be tougher than those of the past. They will learn to absorb more and expect less. They know, as Eliot pointed out, that even if humanity continues to vary round its present mean, never getting much better or much worse, there is always the possibility that a saint or a genius may arise. To have kept open the way for genius is the reward that struggling talent in any movement can count as worthy.

Indeed, it is the chief task of the young poets today to keep alive the hope for poetry, for without such hope the future is a land of monoliths and decaying statuary. In his *Creative Centuries,* Randall has shown that the revival of Roman law at Bologna was made possible only by the Roman subjects of the Barbarian kings, who throughout the Dark Ages kept the code alive through untold dangers and difficulties . . . ' 'Tis an useful moral.' Useful, one would think, in this age when young poets have little enough to hope for, and a wilderness through which to struggle. But that should not dismay them, for they can learn its secrets from the poet of the *Waste Land.* Through him they can learn that if everything passes, everything is also renewed.

EDGAR FOXALL

TIME'S PRISONER: A Note on Edwin Muir

WHEN so much has been written about so many poets it is with something of surprise that one discovers how little attention has been paid to two poets of importance, both members of the older generation and both head and shoulders above many poets at present held in popular esteem. They are Robert Graves, undoubtedly one of the most significant poets of our time, and Edwin Muir, a less important but, nevertheless, a most distinguished figure. Both these, as writers, are well known and both have been praised for their less important contributions to English literature—their prose writings; Graves for his novels; Muir for his translations (notably of Kafka) and his literary criticism. Only recently has an appreciation of their poetry extended beyond a small circle of readers and this is strange when one pauses to reflect that, of the many poets good, bad and indifferent published today these two share one thing that should have made their work acceptable to a comparatively large audience: a compelling precision of thought and clarity of expression. The poetry of both, while being often profound, is never wilfully obscure or obscure through a lack of technique.

Edwin Muir is a man obsessed by Time. In that obsession lies his strength and his weakness as a poet. His strength because this most pliable of themes has given fine scope to his peculiar talent for fixing an object in a moving panorama and imbuing it with an unusual spiritual significance so that even the most mundane theme assumes an air of universal implication and importance; his weakness because it causes a repetetiveness that can be most irritating. For more than fifteen years the recurring theme of his poems has been time or space and time.

Variations on a Time Theme, published by Dent in 1934, is a slight book containing ten sections of a poetic sequence in which the poet wrestles, in a dominant fashion, with the idea of man trapped by Time (with a capital T) and powerless in his fight against it. The weakness of the poem is apparent when one compares it with his later poems on the same theme. It lies in his faulty approach to the subject matter. He appears to have issued an ultimatum; to have said: 'Now I shall write a poem about *Time*' much in the same way as one imagines Priestly to have done at the time of *I Have Been Here Before.* The comparative success of the later work of both is due to the fact that

they have learned to imply rather than to state directly, their views on this, in literature, most rewarding of natural phenomena.

Muir is not interested in Space/Time in any Kantian sense. Time for him is a labyrinth in which man is trapped; a labyrinth that may be equated with the prison of flesh and bone in which is hobbled the ever-progressing, ever-frustrated Spirit. It is not surprising, therefore, that his latest book is entitled *The Labyrinth* and it is particularly interesting to note that the opening line of the title poem reads: 'Since I emerged that day from the labyrinth' for, in Muir's last three books—and particularly in *The Voyage*—one has felt that he has been gradually freeing himself from some enveloping coils that have hitherto prevented the full flowering of his lyric talent. Though not without profit he had indeed been trapped by Time.

Although Muir's theme is Time it has always been a confining rather than a liberating element and this may be due to the fact that he has been weighed down by a sense of the past rather than stimulated by any glorious vision of the future. Throughout his poems one is confronted by the brooding presence of ominous landscapes—a sort of 'Sour Land'. The air of doom; the withered tree; the broken and irreparable wall and the decayed garden haunt him as gaunt half-destroyed buildings and gloomy, fantastically outmoded beds and rooms obsessed the painter James Pryde. It is not difficult to appreciate his obvious interest in, and fascination by, writers like Holderlin and Kafka.

His early poetry labours beneath a somewhat ponderous and staid metrical scheme. Rhyme is used consistently and this, coupled with the persistent use of a rather flat and plodding iambic pentameter, makes *Variations on a Time Theme* rather monotonous reading. (I should perhaps qualify this remark—the metre is, in fact, in this book, often varied but the cumulative effect is of a poem written in iambic pentameter.) There is little here to quicken the imagination and only a few lines like:

> *Ransomed from darkness and released in Time;*
> *Caught, pinnioned, blinded—sealed and cased in Time;*
> *Summoned, elected, armed and crowned by Time;*
> *Tried and condemned, stripped and disowned by Time;*
> *Suckled and weaned, plumped and full-fed by Time;*
> *Defrauded, starved, physicked and bled by Time;*
> *Buried alive and buried dead by Time;*

give an indication of what might be expected of him. There is

nothing to lead one to suppose that he might develop into the fine lyrical poet that his last two books prove him to be.

Journeys and Places, published three years later, also by Dent, shows a marked advance. The poetry is at once more simple and more authoritative. Putting the book down one may feel a little weary of so many poems saying 'I do not know this place' or 'This is the place'—or if not saying it, implying it—but nevertheless one has been rewarded by many felicities of phrase; many ideas far removed from the rut of so much poeticising, and one or two excellently sustained and finely evocative poems, like the curious and not-to-be-fathomed *The Hill,* and *The Road* with its opening verse:

There is a road that turning always
Cuts of the country of Again.
Archers stand there on every side
And as it runs Time's deer is slain,
And lies where it has lain.

In *Journeys and Places* one could discern the tiny flower that was to grow and flower in the poems published during the war years and after.

In 1943 Fabers published *The Narrow Place,* a book neglected at the time but now no doubt eagerly sought by readers of *The Voyage* and *The Labyrinth.* The advance on his earlier poetry is startling. For the most part the new poems are tighter in construction and more closely reasoned and a new element of compassion has crept in. The poetry begins to be, though more restrained, more human also. The rhythms are more subtle and the general harmony of most of the poems is far in advance of what had gone before. In this book the 'scene of War' is implied though Muir seems never to have written anything that can be termed 'war poetry' proper. Everywhere we are confronted by a vision of the world and man as declining from a healthy and vigorous past. A kind of shadowy doom invades the book; an air of almost Cassandra-like prophecy. The gardens are always neglected, the armour and treasure shines in memory only, for in reality it is rusted or long since overgrown and concealed by earth and weeds. An insidious rot has set in, the more terrible because it comes from the inside. *The Refugees* begins with the line: 'A crack ran through our hearthstones long ago' and that in general is the prevailing tone of the book. It is a sinister—almost Kafkaesque—picture that in some, possibly unintentional, way reminds one of the present decay of the aristocracy. But it must

not be supposed from this that Muir's poetry is pessimistic in any self-pitying manner. He shows us the dissolution of what was once fair in a vigorous, almost heroic fashion.

One of the most remarkable, and to my mind most successful poems in the book, *The Good Man in Hell* describes simply how, should a good man in error be trapped in Hell he might, by his steadfast goodness, affect his companions so as to begin to reform them and so set in motion the natural process of life and the necessary combination of good and evil. It is a theme that shows to the full Muir's peculiar tolerance of the folly and ignorance of mankind. He is always prepared, if not to forgive, a deliberate act of evil, at least to try to understand the cause of it.

Following *The Narrow Place* came, in 1946, *The Voyage,* in my view his best collection of poems to date. I find in it more individually satisfying poems than in *The Labyrinth,* although the laater book is perhaps the more impressive taken as a whole. Nearly all the poems in *The Voyage* are lyrics and very good they are too. They have about them, at times, an almost Elizabethan flavour in their directness and in their tenderness, which never declines into mere sentimentality.

A number of critics have remarked that Muir stands outside contemporary fashion and that is, to an extent, true. When, however, they go on to say that he stands outside tradition they are surely wrong. It is perfectly true that one cannot link his work with any one particular phase of English poetry but, like most really fine poetry, it bears a resemblance to the best work of more than one period. One catches echoes of the grace of eighteenth-century songs yet can also, at times, detect something of the brooding majesty of poems like *The City of Dreadful Night.*

Sorrow, which is typical of his lyric style, begins:

I do not want it so
But since things so are made,
Sorrow, Sorrow,
Be you my second trade.
I'll learn the workman's skill
And mould the mass of ill
Until I have it so, or so,
And want it so.

and I do not see how one can believe that to be divorced from the English tradition of lyric writing.

There is no more difficult subject to discuss than lyric poetry; exactly why one jingle is poetry and another merely competent

verse is a question that will in all probability never be satisfactorily answered. This difficulty has caused too much modern criticism to fall into the fatal error of discussing the importance of what a poet says at the expense of how he says it.

Because of this much excellent lyric poetry of the last few years has been overlooked simply because it is so difficult to criticize. The result has been a preponderance of critical articles dealing almost exclusively with Mr. X's belief and Mr. Y's doubt instead of the *poetical*, as opposed to philosophical, value of their work. Content is, of course, important, but it is not as important as all that. A preoccupation with immediate social events and ills, for instance, deluded too many poets of the 'thirties into believing that by accurately cataloguing a few symptoms of the decline of society they were producing valid poetry. Critics in their turn were distracted from their job of valuing the work as poetry and turned their critical faculties to a discussion of the politico/philosophical falseness or rightness of the work under review. Undoubtedly, the greatest poets are those who possess the capacity for fusing matter and expression into a well balanced whole, but next to these come those who are good as *poets* and to hell with what they say! A man may live in Peckham or Glasgow all his life and by his power of expression create a work of art out of the drabness and uneventfulness of his life, while another, having travelled to the wildest parts of the earth may succeed in writing the most pedestrian and dull book in the world. So with the poet; it is little use having visions if you are unable, satisfactorily, to communicate them through your art. Better to live on a less exalted plane and possess the faculty of transforming more mundane happenings into formal works of beauty. This is true of all art but especially is it true of poetry. An acquaintance with Elizabethan songbooks should convince any one of its truth. However significant Blake's major works may be as philosophy they fall, as poetry, far below his lyrics. And yet the greatness of the lyrics hinges on nothing more than a correct balance of vowels and consonants. (Why is 'O rose thou art sick' poetic and 'O rose thou art ill' ludicrous?)

It is, therefore, impossible to communicate, through the medium of prose, the beauty of Muir's lyrical poetry. All one can do is to indicate something of his lyric style. Rarely are his poems the result of the use of romantic 'poetical' language. Isolated words and phrases are not often evocative in themselves. Where Laurie Lee, a born lyricist, will dazzle by his extravagant use of images,

his colour and music, Muir holds the attention by the exact opposite. Taken individually his lines are often dry, commonplace, precise, and 'unpoetical' as can be; yet the sum total of half a dozen or so is of consummate grace and beauty. What, for instance, could be more ordinary than the opening of *The Child Dying* from *The Labyrinth*:

Unfriendly, friendly universe,
I pack your stars into my purse,
and bid you, bid you so farewell.
That I can leave you, quite go out,
Go out, go out beyond all doubt,
My father says, is the miracle.

and yet it is difficult to believe that many will be unresponsive to the subtle beauty of the verse as a whole; a beauty that becomes more apparent as the poem progresses.

In the last lyric but one in *The Labyrinth* Muir proposes that 'Love gathers all' and if Love, like Death, is a common poetic subject it has a special place in this poet's writing. He has never held a romantically sloppy view of love; he has never been bowled over by it. When dealing with the subject—as he has done often—it has been with a restraint and a fine feeling for the flavour of individually telling words. This lyric entitled, simply, *Song* ends:

The quarrel from the start
Long past and never past,
The war of mind and heart,
The great war and the small
That tumbles the hovel down
And topples town on town,
Come to one place at last:
Love gathers all.

and here, as elsewhere in his work, Love is the healer; whether universal or individual love. If our ills are to be cured at last it is through love and love only that this will be achieved.

This verse is unmistakably Muir; 'Long past and never past', 'The great war and the small' are phrases peculiar to him, both in thought and balance; and balance in his poetry is most noticeable. What may at first reading appear to be awkward falls into correct perspective on closer acquaintance.

Some of the longer poems in *The Labyrinth* seem to me to be less successful. There is still a little of the early flatness about them; a certain dryness and monotony; and there is a tendency

toward verboseness. He occasionally becomes entangled in his own digressions at the expense of the movement and development of the poem proper. But these faults are becoming more rare and will no doubt soon disappear altogether.

There can be no doubt that Muir is a poet of dignity and excellence. He speaks with an individual voice and he has added to the store of English poetry a handful of lyrics, at least, that should outlive him.

The Labyrinth may well mark a turning point in his development, for in it there are signs that he has come to the end of a vein of poetic matter that he has been working for more than fifteen years. His next book will show if he has thrown off his obsession and instead of being Time's prisoner has become his master. But, whatever happens, his place among the leading poets of our day is secure. Without any fuss and without pandering to the whims of fashion he has gone on writing steadily—and steadily improving—and he may be justifiably proud of his achievement. He has proved that Time *will* tell.

C. BUSBY SMITH

DADDY WOULDN'T BUY ME A BOW-WOW (Bow-Wow) or THE BARKER UP THE AXLE-TREE

News of the World by GEORGE BARKER (Faber, 8/6).

It is time responsible publishers ceased to make such idiotic remarks in the blurbs of the books they wish to sell. Any more fatuous or inapposite comparison than that of George Barker's poems to the song of the sirens, it would be difficult to imagine—the sirens, whose song was 'out of this world,' otherworldly and of supernatural perfection, and to which Odysseus had to stop his ears for fear it should encompass his destruction or beguile him from the tasks which confronted him; George Barker, whose poems are so much of this world that they are often humanly fallible to the extent of an incredible gaucheness, and who confronts one in any randomly chosen few lines with most of the despairs and horrors of our civilization! Like Henry Allen, the jazz trumpeter, in a different field, George Barker is capable at one and the same time of the most astonishing virtuosity and a quite laughable, unconsciously clownish clumsiness, so that as one reads, from sentence to sentence, one thinks 'How good, how marvellous! Who else could have brought off such a breath-taking effect!' and the next moment one's exclaiming 'Good

Lord! . . . you can't do that!' However, he can and does, as Henry Allen can and does, and, though it may sometimes be funny when it's not meant to be or so bad that it makes one's hair stand on end to think that such things can be perpetrated, it is always daring, interesting, and full of verve—even when it's bad.

At their best George Barker's poems remind me of nothing so strongly as the choruses of Greek plays, those untranslatable choruses that Gilbert Murray found so impossible to transpose into his hearty Chestertonian cadences; there is the same sombre, tragic tone, the same repetitive warnings of doom, the same kind of moralizing apostrophe, and the same illusive density and difficulty of language; even the same concentration on weeping and wailing for the fated and the dead; and the same apparently clumsy, condensed and inverted grammar:

O stop the calling killer in the skull
Like beasts we turn toward!
For was the nightriding siren beautiful
Caterwauling War until her bed was full
Of the uxorious dead?
Let the great moaning of the seven seas,
Let only the seas mourn

etc.

He has also the same habit of referring loosely, but pointedly to familiar, or not so familiar, legends or legendary figures or catchphrases, such as 'the seven seas' here, and an endearing habit—endearing to me because I have always been fond of my father's puns—of making terrible puns in the most impossible places—'That was an Eire ago' in a sonnet on Ireland, the matter of which is perfectly serious, though its performance is marred by other less endearing gaffes than this.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding a few 'diurnally shipwrecked / Downed nocturnal breasts' and so forth (*Galway Bay*, too, is not a good poem in spite of the fascinating 'homing empresses of the sea'), this is one of Mr. Barker's most satisfactory books. (And of what other contemporary's latest book can that be said?) He is quite a considerable poet, even if he has no visual imagery, a fact which tends to confuse a reading public brought up to regard all images as visual. Barker's are not (try to make any coherent 'picture' of them and you'll go crazy): they are intellectual. It is, apart from this, an interesting fact to find in a poet who has generally been regarded as a romantic.

NICHOLAS MOORE

The Edge of Being by STEPHEN SPENDER (Faber, 7/6).

Immortal Diamond. Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Norman Weyand, S.J., with the assistance of Raymond V. Schoder, S.J.; introduction by John Pick (Sheed and Ward, 21/-).

The Hippolytus of Euripides. A new translation by REX WARNER (The Bodley Head, 7/6).

I am informed, on credible authority, that Mr. Spender once wrote some extremely beautiful poems. I myself belong to a generation which has been forced to witness, in each successive volume of his later work, a further symptom of the disintegration of a lost Romantic, eddying uneasily between the Scylla and Charybdis of his head and heart. Those a little older than myself may point to his earlier poems as proof of the very great promise which he once possessed. I cannot help thinking that it is possible to over-rate these early poems, especially if one grew up with them, and could respond generously to the emotions of human pity and love of liberty which informs so many of them. But they are beyond all measure superior to what Mr. Spender is writing today.

Both head and heart are necessary to the shaping of a poem; yet it is engendered in neither of them, but in the imagination working on the material supplied to it directly by the senses. In spite of what has often been said, it seems to me that Mr. Spender's poetry is lacking in any clear sensuous basis. When he would write directly of sensuous experience, he gives us this sort of thing:

> *O night O trembling night O night of stars*
> *O night when my body was a rod O night*
> *When my mouth was a vague animal cry*
> *Pasturing on her flesh.*

That's the trouble—not only animal, but vague. Human beings learn precision, and consciousness.

Ninety per cent. of the book consists of this sort of vague self-presentation—not of a personality, but of a bundle of nerves. Only in one poem, 'Rejoice in this Abyss,' does Mr. Spender seem to me to attain to something like genuine imaginative vision. In 'A night of the Blitz', the poet becomes suddenly conscious of the whole city of London as a vast community of the living and the dead. The verse, as it were, widens out from the speaker's

own private fears and shames, into this sense of community:

The streets were filled with London prophets,
Saints of Covent Garden, Parliament Hill Fields,
Hampstead Heath, Lambeth and Saint John's Wood
Churchyard,
Who cried in cockney fanatic voices:
'In the midst of life is death!' And they all kneeled
And prayed against the misery manufactured
In mines and ships and mills, against
The greed of merchants, the vain hopes of churches . . .

But, sakes alive!—did it require the whole weight of General Goering's Air Force to shake Mr. Spender out of himself and make him write poetry again?

Immortal Diamond. This handsome, shiny volume consists of a series of studies of Hopkins by members of the Society of Jesus. It was originally planned for the centenary of the poet's birth in 1944, but was delayed on account of the war. As one might have expected, it is thorough and scholarly, and rather formidable. Men who have shared Hopkins' religious vocation, and who have lived their life under the same discipline as he, have naturally much to contribute to our understanding of the poet. On the other hand, it is inevitable that there should be a certain sameness of approach, and a slight—ever so slight!—air of hagiology. Perhaps the best articles are those which deal in matters of pure scholarship. These include a study of the history of 'Sprung Rhythm' in English poetry, from the Anglo-Saxon period down to Hopkins himself, by Fr. Walter J. Ong, a glossary of difficult words in the poems, by Fr. Raymond V. Schoder, and an Appendix on the historical basis of *The Wreck of the Deutschland,* by Fr. Robert R. Boyle. Best of all, though very much for the classical specialist, is Fr. John Louis Bonn's 'Greco-Roman Verse Theory and Gerard Manley Hopkins' which I recommend to any poet who really wants to get to rock bottom in regard to the technicalities of his own art.

The Hippolytus of Euripides. Dehydrated food is generally more wholesome than that to which artificial colouring matter has been added. The public has taken the twopence-coloured pre-Raphaelite versions which Professor Murray has made of the Greeks so securely to its bosom, that Mr. Warner may prove a useful corrective. But though he sticks, with commend-

able honesty as well as scholarship, close to the sense of the original, and though his language really is the living language of men, the general effect is not the austere beauty of an Attic temple, but the intolerable featurelessness of a block of modern utility flatlets. Mr. Warner probably believes, in good faith, that he is using a 'sprung' line of six stresses, but he is, in fact, just writing plain bald prose, chopped up into lengths—and I'm not the sort of person who says that all modern verse is that. Of course, a prose version—like Yeats's *Oedipus*—is perfectly feasible; but it had better be good prose, and it had better not try and pass itself off as verse. But a lyrical drama, like the Greek, really needs the dancing movement of verse to come alive. H.D.'s *Ion,* in free verse (yes, but it *is* verse) though deficient in scholarship (I am told) is more the sort of thing we want.

As for the play itself, it might be a good one for the twentieth-century reader unacquainted with Greek drama to make a start on. The *Hippolytus* is domestic tragedy. One could transfer it, only altering names and a few particulars, intact to a modern, or nearly modern, setting—say a country house in the mid-nineteenth century. (Hippolytus would have to go off to Australia with the paternal curse, and suffer a fatal accident on the way; Minoan Phaedra would be a Parisian, with a scheming, hard-headed French peasant woman for nurse.) The two Olympians, Aphrodite and Artemis, are, in this play, so patently personifications of forces in the human psyche—sexual passion and the impulse to deny passion—that the twentieth-century reader can swallow them without difficulty. But the twentieth-century reader had better be told that Euripides is more 'modern' than Aeschylus and Sophocles, only if he is their inferior.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Epitaphs and Occasions by ROY FULLER (John Lehmann, 6s.); *The Lost Son* by THEODORE ROETHKE (John Lehmann, 6s.); *Radio and Poetry* by MILTON ALLEN KAPLAN (Columbia University Press, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 36s.).

It would be unreasonable to expect the critic to produce the perfect example, conforming to the principles he upholds, of the art with which he is concerned. But when the critic is himself a poet, and when he has used forceful language in exposing what he considers to be the major defects of the 'pre-

vailing romanticism of poetry in our time', there is, perhaps, something to be gained from a study of his own creative efforts in the light of his most penetrating criticisms. Now Mr. Roy Fuller has said a great deal to the effect that neo-romantic poetry is both woolly-minded and boneless. It is interesting, therefore, that in the *Dedicatory Poem* of his latest volume, he should refer back to Wordsworth for the appropriate poetic vocabulary:

The poet now must put verse back
Time and again upon the track
That first was cut by Wordsworth when
He said that verse was meant for men
And ought to speak on all occasions
In language which has no evasions.

Certainly there is nothing shapeless about *his* work. His thoughts are expressed in decisive and unambiguous phrases which cut their way into the reader's mind. Mr. Fuller is a craftsman of versatility, using his intellect and almost sardonic wit to advantage, but it is precisely because he is honest enough to 'speak . . . in language which has no evasions' that one perceives more clearly how superficial and occasional are some of these poems. Nevertheless, they can be enjoyed for their surface sparkle alone. Self-conscious of his 'bourgeois' place in the social strata, he looks continually back to 'the sensual past', when 'the deed or thought fulfilling the pattern was cast' and on the few occasions that he is able to overcome his despondency for the future, can be as romantic—if ironically so—in outlook as his contemporaries:

Perhaps
The preposterous fishing-line tangle of undesired
Human existence will suddenly unravel
Before some staggering equation
Or mystic experience, and God be released
From the moral particle or blue-lit room.

It is in the short poem dealing, ostensibly, with a single theme—though having a latent content enveloping other forms of existence than that he adopts for his purpose—that Mr. Theodore Roethke's preoccupation with the slow organic forces of life manifests itself in an extraordinary manner. If he writes of 'nature', it is not the birds or buds or golden daffodils that claim his attention, but the underground sucking and sobbing of roots, the action of leaf-mould and manure, and the 'urge, wrestle, resurrection of

dry sticks'. It is the persistence of being, the blind silent pressure in the darkness, rather than the 'beauty' which fascinates him:

Nothing would give up life;
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

And this is equally evident when he turns from his flower-dumps and forcing houses to human beings, where his method becomes even more effective in its application to the underground forces of lust and fear. The four longer poems of the last section are less successful, principally because the material is not fully assimilated; and his habit of asking rhetorical questions, such as 'Who stunned the dirt into noise?', 'Has the worm a shadow?', or 'What bleeds when metal breaks?' is more tedious than profound.

Most poets, and particularly those who have yet to establish their reputations, are affected by the apparent lack of interest on the part of the public. In the October issue of *Poetry* (Chicago), a number of publishers expressed, somewhat pessimistically, their various opinions on the subject without reaching the merest hint of a solution. The only point on which they were all agreed was that the audience for serious poetry was so 'unbelievably' small, that the publication of work even by well known poets was not an economic proposition.

Dr. Milton A. Kaplan has approached the problem from a different angle and believes that by bringing the poet into more direct touch with the public, radio will provide the means by which the poet's audience can be enlarged. In his volume, *Radio and Poetry*, he has attempted not only to trace the development of a new literature—'poetry of the air'—but also to examine the specific requirements and possibilites of radio as the appropriate medium. It must be admitted, however, that his conception of radio poetry is a very broad one. In addition to verse drama, epics, ballads, light verse and poetic prose, he is so tolerant in his enthusiasm as to include advertising messages and jingles. In defence of these unexpected inclusions, he says: 'Those who are inclined to disparage the influence of the advertising jingles may be surprised to learn that during the war many jingles in French attacking the Nazi invaders were shortwaved to Occupied France by the OWI'. Whether or not one is surprised by this information, and however effective as propaganda the transmissions may have been, one remains unconvinced (to say the least) that such items may validly be classified as any form of poetry.

Naturally, Dr. Kaplan is most concerned with broadcasting

conditions in the United States, where sponsored programmes are firmly established and advertising provides the radio industry with its main source of income. Broadcasting companies are no more philanthropic than publishing companies and usually have fewer incentives towards maintaining artistic integrity. So that when poetry readings have to compete with broadcasts designed to appeal to the sentimentality of mass audiences, and when the size of the audience is the determining factor in deciding which programmes shall be retained, poetry must inevitably be driven off the air. The radio sponsor is seldom interested in aesthetic taste unless it has some influence on the sale of his products. As Mr. S. I. Hayakawa has pointed out—'The restoration of poetry to its traditional state as one of the most important of the communicators and creators of the values a civilization lives by awaits, therefore, a time when something less than 98% of radio time and 85% of space in mass-circulation magazines is devoted to selling something. It awaits an economic change profound enough to relieve advertisers of the necessity of invoking all the symbols of home, of mother, and of the American way of life, of morality, and of the Christian religion in order to sell a box of soap-flakes.'

Nevertheless, it has been found by broadcasters such as David Ross and A. M. Sullivan that the main obstacle to poetry programmes is not the lack of a wide and varied audience, but the commercial attitude of the radio executives and business sponsors, and their antagonism towards poetry. In fact, readings of poetry secured a much larger audience than had been anticipated. It is fortunate that there are in operation a number of educational stations which are in no way controlled by commercial interests. Two of these, WOSO (Ohio State University) and WHA (University of Wisconsin) have featured poetry programmes for several years.

The major portion of Dr. Kaplan's book deals comprehensively with the problems surrounding the writing and producing of verse plays. His detailed examination of dramatic, poetic, and documentary technique, his analysis of the essential characteristics of the radio medium, and his conclusions, amply supported by extracts from successful plays, make *Radio and Poetry* of great value to any poet who contemplates writing for the air.

HOWARD SERGEANT

Poètes Anglais des Contemporains A Chaucer by ANDRE MAISONNEUVE (Hachett). *Cassell's Anthology of French Poetry,* selected and translated by ALAN CONDER (Cassells, 10s. 6d.).

The Judgment of Peers, an anthology of poems about poets, compiled by W. G. BEBBINGTON (Staples, 7/6). *The Banquet, and Other Poems* by WALTER ROBERTS (Staples, 7/6). *Plain Song* by OLIVER DAVIES (Staples, 8/6).

M. Maisonneuve has sought to give his countrymen an anthology of English verse which will exemplify the Modern Spirit, but his selection, though it has stimulating moments, is already out of date, for the spirit which it has captured is that of the 'thirties rather than that of 1950. This is made all the more obvious by the over-representation of the Moderns and a method of arrangement which places them cheek by jowl with better poems by the Ancients. Thus Spender surveying the Working Classes ('They stare through with such hungry eyes') has to face some strong couplets by Crabbe on a similar subject, while the early illustration which depicts Chaucer triumphantly above T. S. Eliot is not without significance.

We realize very early that this is not a balanced anthology. Byron is not given his due, and the Elizabethans are chiefly represented by Shakespeare, often in snippets from his plays. Wilde, Dowson, Darley, Gay, Flecker, Masefield and William Morris are left out, and it cannot be for lack of space when we are supplied with eight poems by T. S. Eliot, seven by W. H. Auden, six by Spender, and five by Cecil Day Lewis. And what poems too! Do we really want the French to know that an English poet spent September 1st, 1939,

in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid . . . ?

—Or that Day Lewis used his *Magnetic Mountain* as a symbol of the Communistic ideal of the Good Life?

Modern English poetry is certainly not illuminated by a group which could only reflect 'a low dishonest decade' and made no attempt in their verse to set any artistic standard which might improve it. If M. Maisonneuve had turned to Andrew Young or

Edwin Muir he would not have found the feeble spirit of Day Lewis's confession:

I sang as one
Who on a tilting deck sings
To keep their courage up.

And if he had bothered to include Christopher Fry, he could have shown that the Modern Spirit is Elizabethan and exuberant rather than slum-dwelling in the 'thirties, while he might have managed a better portrait gallery of author's photographs than the old familiar collection of stuffed parrots. But perhaps M. Maisonneuve will use the knife unsparingly on his next edition, for he is obviously a man at home with the main tradition of English Poetry, if ill-advised on the Modern Period, and his anthology is an important one.

Mr. Conder has, to some extent, been doing a similar service for French literature, but since his book has been already well-reviewed and carries appreciations by Louis Cazamian and Walter de la Mare, it would be presumptuous to do more than to indicate its scope. The collection ranges from Charles of Orleans to Jules Supervielle, and Ronsard, Du Bellay, Jean de la Fontaine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Paul Valery are particularly well represented. The English renderings are honest, quiet and sincere, tending to be slightly over-traditional in language but with a fair sprinkling of phrases with which even a bi-lingual poet could not quarrel. Above all, this collection represents the work of thirty years by a man who has studied his subject, and for that reason alone his anthology deserves the attention of any student of French verse.

From time to time, a divine madness afflicts publishers, and they think to atone for publishing mediocre but profitable prose by publishing mediocre but unprofitable verse. Normally it is the publisher's relations or friends or some best-selling author who has secretly been compiling verse who profits on these occasions. but from time to time some comparative unknown finds his manuscript hurled into print and some months subsequently his poems achieve a certain value for wrapping up consignments of more successful books.

I have before had occasion to praise Messrs. Staples for publishing a book of poems by Conrad Aiken. This time I can only beg them to get a new Reader for their poetry manuscripts. For this trio is neither good nor bad but the apotheosis of indifference.

Mr. Bebbington had at least the merit of a good idea, and his anthology of poems about poets ought to have been of interest, but so many of the poems are bad (e.g. Auden's silly poems about Lear and Housman), that one is tempted at the end to agree with Cowper that 'there is a pleasure in poetic pains which only poets know'.

Walter Roberts possesses the Olympic Diploma for Lyric Poetry, and he has the measured competence of a latter-day Gray at his best, as in his description of a travelling photographer, but his *Banquet* is as watery as Timon of Athens' and his mixture of religion and philosophy is as unappetising as wax fruit. His real talent, which is all too little displayed in this book is for the detailed observation of Nature and of Man as a social animal. Let him avoid his Welsh nationalism-cum-pacifism-cum-sententious moralising and all will be well.

Oliver Davies has not published a book for over twenty years, and if he had published a selection a quarter the size of his present book, he might have shown up as a rhyming religious man capable of neat, if limited, effects. As it is, his range of metre is too narrow and instead of 'a world of gold against ungolden weather', we hear that the poet 'sometimes feels a fool upon his Civil Service stool'.

It may well be that I have been hard upon these three books. They have the merit of being easy to read and understand, and intelligible verse put together by men who have read some poetry before T. S. Eliot, is perhaps a rarity in an age when obscurity is considered a virtue. But all three books did not deserve to come into print in their present state, and a wise publisher would have demanded improvements. Messrs. Staples, please note!

JOHN BAYLISS

OBSCURED RADIANCE

In Wake of Wind by GLORIA KOMAI (Sylvan Press).

MISS Komai is a poet of unusual sensibility: the images she summons forth to celebrate the seasons have an almost three-dimensional nature—their richness appears to stand out from the page.

Sometimes this plethora of impressions impedes the progress of the theme: the nouns without articles, crowded together, giving to

the line not verbal fluency so much as a kind of morse effect. One seems to be reading a poet's private shorthand:

Green muttering of leaves; oppressed roses;
Closed gates, black iron lace, face mob thunder;
Cut ivy ropes; trees pinned, blue octopus
Of lightning; garden dragged to level pearl.

Only in the last of these images is a hint extended to a full perception: the other are like 'stills' whisked away before one's eyes. Her poetry telescopes phenomena too much.

Another factor retarding her work from immediate recognition is its non-English derivation. Her poems seem to emanate from a mind whose conception of verse owes more to Rilke, Mallarmé and Verlaine than to any of our native poets. (This is particularly borne out, perhaps, by the syntax of the first four lines of her moving poem, 'Who stands close to my shoulder'.)

But Miss Komai is a genuine poet. The tension of memory or imagination is always present in her verse. There are no lacunae of prosaicness, and no affected posturings in it. What she needs most, it would appear, is the sense of having to convey to others things which are clearly apparent to herself: what she has to say is so well worth hearing.

DEREK STANFORD

THE POETRY OF JAMES KIRKUP

In a world where the quality of wonder, not to mention the imagination, is fast being drowned under the encroaching precision of science, it is more necessary than ever to listen to the children. In the visual arts of this abominable century there have, of course, been men like Klee whose perceptions spring directly from a green, enquiring, devastating gaze. They frame maturely the immature but often exact vision of innocence. But in poetry this has been greatly lacking. True, we have had our jogging rhymers and our condescending Literary Aunts. But only de la Mare and—more recently, perhaps Treece, who have had the genuine vision. And then, of course, there is James Kirkup.

Kirkup started off in the early 'forties rather determinedly on the wrong foot. He wrote short, indefinite poems, thinking in French (he is a scholar of distinction) and writing in English. Moreover, he thought in the particular French that was developed

by Mallarmé and even employed a similar system of pronunciation (spacings to aid readers, no semi-colons and so forth). But one had begun to glimpse the strange, slightly forlorn note in his verse—and the shimmering arrangement of images—that would later reach so vivid an expression.

So far he has had only one book published, *The Drowned Sailor*—and most of his work has appeared in a vast quantity of magazines over the last six years—so that it is a little difficult to plot certain aspects of his development chronologically. The problem of identity, however (and this—as with certain children—is at the very core of all he does) establishes itself from the first. In *A Poem for Christmas* we have the conjuror:

> *His twisted face is pale, and not*
> *exactly like an uncle's*

surely this is Kirkup; and then, in *Advertisement*, we have the lines:

> *But you will never be the same again,*
> *and I shall be consumed in it, and you.*

It, as might be expected, is a dream. Other connections will be clear.

We now come to a poem which can only stimulate the most fascinating conjectures. This is *Implicity*—written, by the author's declaration, on a planchette board, and containing much material—one would suppose—for the Society of Psychical Research. It reads like the tragic monologue of a student who has committed suicide and is now in a disembodied state; it is, to so rational a person as the present writer, slightly incredible and totally alarming. Lines like

> *the heart is hell,*
> *the soul is there describing it*

and

> *you are your own ex machina*

cause a curious feeling of apprehension; if the poem was, indeed written 'through' Mr. Kirkup, may not the actual creator be justified in saying what he likes about immortality and the soul and be absolutely right? It is, perhaps, best to leave this poem, and its connotations, to the reader's discretion.

Here, even, the sea washed from afar—its forlorn note, like the dying hornpipe of a lost sailor, begins to pervade his work. The presence of ocean is not surprising (his home is South Shields, and its landscapes, from all angles, have been etched by him).

What is surprising is the extraordinary concentration which he brings to long passages describing the whole sensations of drowning, losing consciousness, and living again.

It is a relief to turn to *The Vigil*, with its charming and moving (but oddly cold) record of an ordinary experience. The poem is about a friend who has died, a friend whose stillness was so beautiful once. But (there is mention of a 'plunge') could the friend have been drowned? It may be that this experience brought with it the associations that fill so much of his work at the time.

But there are brightly-lit passages in the poems too—an enchanting romantic flair informs *To the Moon, Nightfall,* and *Legend.*

Philosophy and metaphysics (now quite predominant in Kirkup's work) occur rather fragmentarily in, for instance, *Variations On a Theme*:

> *We live in separation*
> *feeling outwards, so so,*
> *with a small madness.*
> *Feeling round the rim of what is not,*
> *that is but a little space, dividing leaf and leaf,*
> *and seems eternity.*

But there is something a little half-hearted in this attempt to enter cosmological and other fields. Kirkup is much better when he is singing the lament of a dead gardener, taking up the cry off the plants and vegetables and introducing closely inter-woven and enchanting images (his images always spring direct from within the poem, they are not tacked on from outside). The inherent detail of these images can, however, be embarassing—as, for instance in *Wild Wilbur,* a conducted tour over an American sailor that is easily Kirkup's worst poem and was included, with customary perversity, by Mr. Grigson in his recent selection of new verse.

All the qualities and failings of Kirkup's style, his subtle rhythms, typographical whims, wonderful images and incomparable atmospheric sense are made clear all the way in his most typical, but not his best poem, *The Drowned Sailor.* Starting like Hopkins diluted with water, it drifts in a shamelessly diffuse but fascinating way through the whole gamut of the poet's marine imagination. Although mentioned here, *The Drowned Sailor* is, in reality an early work, but it should stand in the middle of his development as it indicates precisely the balance struck between the child's eye and the vision of men and of angels.

There is not space to deal in full with the much more mature and almost great poem *The Sleeper in the Earth.* Written in the country over a period of a year, and built up like a symphony, this is crammed with the most astonishing virtuosity, technical accomplishment and 'beauty' (whatever is meant by that). What is more, it introduces the poet to us like a diary. Neither can one discuss at leisure the process by which the theme of identity established itself so completely in such poems as *The Travelling Companion* and *Narcissus,* nor how his descriptive powers leapt to full flower in his poem for Ram Gopal:

> *roots deep as dance and breathing share*
> *the beating heart of earth and stone,*
> *discover eagle radiance in the wells*
> *of crystal dark, and set the flower free to die*
> *in brilliant fingers spirited upon a stem of air.*

His latest poems on metaphysics, so much more compact and better-expressed than his early efforts in the genre, would each require a detailed analysis.

He is the author of several experimental novels, and a journal (part of the latter has been published); he is a very good critic indeed; scrupulously fair and without an atom of the usual malice. His blind spots are few and understandable. He has translated some of Michaud's prose poems with great delicacy (his translation, notably of Valéry, and his interpretation of paintings into verse is another aspect of his art). And he is the most delightful letter writer I know.

This short study will appear to the most austere to smack of adulation. There are many, including Cecil Day Lewis, who will disagree profoundly with even a discussion of Kirkup's technique, which they consider abominable. I can only apologize, and return to my first statements. As I see it, James Kirkup is, like de la Mare, the poet of enchantment, kindness, cruelty, detachment and love, not only a ghostly child but

> *a mortal lost among immortal memories*

and if we, too, are lost for a little while with him, then that is our good fortune. Innocence is a virtue which only the experienced can fully appreciate.

CHARLES HIGHAM